

# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **Congressman John Conyers, Jr.**

**Fourteenth District, Michigan  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary  
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**

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**Contact: Dena Graziano  
(202)226-6888**

### **STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS, JR.** **PRESS CONFERENCE ON HAITIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS**

Representative John Conyers Jr., the Ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, issued the following statement at today's press conference on the unfair treatment of Haitian asylum seekers:

"If we have learned anything since the tragic events of September 11, it is that indiscriminately treating all immigrants as if they are terrorists is not only wrong, its unconstitutional, by denying them equal protection and subjecting them to cruel and unusual punishment.

Yet that is exactly how the Bush Administration is treating Haitian immigrants. If they are intercepted at sea, they are returned to Haiti without a single shred of due process. If they reach our shores and apply for asylum, they are detained indefinitely, many times in squalid and unsanitary conditions. The Bush policy is abusive, discriminatory, and in many cases has confined Haitians here on U.S. soil to conditions even worse than those they fled in Haiti.

U.S. immigration authorities grant parole to more than nine out of ten asylum seekers from other countries. By contrast, Haitians who have been deemed to have plausible claims for asylum have been singled out and then left to languish in detention centers.

During my March visit to facilities in southern Florida I encountered a father with two minor children who had been granted political asylum, but was still held pending appeal by the INS. I also witnessed first hand that many detainees are being held in totally unacceptable conditions. Facilities are operating far above maximum capacity, women, who have committed no crime, are being housed like criminals in a maximum security jail, children are detained indefinitely without access to educational services or playtime outdoors, detainees have been issued only two changes of clothing and limited access to laundry services for an indefinite stay, and detainees are denied access to Creole speaking staff.

In one case a woman who was coughing blood had been denied medical attention because translators were unavailable to inform authorities that she was in need of medical care. On April 9, I asked INS Commissioner Ziegler to justify the Administration's treatment of Haitian immigrants. More than one month later, I have received no response.

Persons fleeing persecution in Haiti, are just as deserving as relief as an immigrant from Europe or Cuba. Today, I call on the Administration to stop discriminating and start enforcing our laws equally and fairly."